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SUBJECT: KURDISTAN ISLAMIC UNION (KIU) LEADER DENIES
ENDORsing CAIRO CONFERENCE OPPOSITION FRONT

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for Reasons
1.4(d) and (b)

¶1. (U) This is a Kurdistan Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT)
cable

¶2. (C) Summary. KIU Secretary General Salahaddin Bahaaddin told RRTOFFs that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani had approved in advance KIU attendance at the April meeting in Cairo where Sunni and Kurdish politicians joined Iraqiyya chief Ayad Allawi in an attempt to form an opposition front. Bahaaddin also said that the KIU attendees were taken by surprise by the adversarial tone of the conference and claimed that while they signed the so-called &Cairo Declaration,⁸ they did not realize it was intended to launch a new opposition movement. President Talabani attacked the KIU for remaining at the meeting despite the presence of two former &Jash⁸ (Kurdish supporters of Saddam). Bahaaddin said that animosities between the Kurdish parties and the meeting's organizers were behind the harsh criticism aimed at the KIU and others. Bahaaddin claims that the KRG Supreme Council has indicated it is satisfied with the KIU's explanations for why they attended and a &propaganda campaign⁸ against the KIU has now ceased. The KIU's hasty public disavowal of support for the Cairo actions in the face of KRG criticism, however, may not sit well with its constituency. End Summary.

¶3. (C) RRTOFFs met on 20 June with Mr. Salahaddin Bahaaddin, the Secretary General of the KIU, and KIU Politburo member Abdul Rahman Saddiq, at the Party's office in Erbil. Bahaaddin opened by saying that he wanted to have better relations between the KIU and the United States, adding that given its current central role in Iraq, the US needs to have a &better understanding of the situation⁸ in the country.

Stability in the KRG Requires Stability in Baghdad

¶4. (C) Commenting on the April conference in Cairo, Bahaaddin noted that his party attended the meeting because "political stability in the Kurdistan region requires stability in Baghdad" and in the GOI. Ever since liberation, he said, the political process has been framed by sectarian division, which is not helping the political process in Iraq.

He described the current imbalance of representation as helping the terrorists.

¶5. (C) The Cairo Conference was only the latest of, he said, &many meetings about Iraq.⁸ Six countries -- Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) sent official representatives. Iraq, however, was only represented by political parties: the Tawafuq List, the Iraqi List, the National Debate, the Iraq Turkoman Front and the KIU. The two leading coalition partners in the GOI however, the

Kurdish list and the Shia list, were not represented. Bahaaddin did not know if they were not invited or chose not to attend.

PM Barzani Pre-Approved KIU Cairo Attendance

¶6. (C) According to Bahaaddin, after KIU leaders received an invitation to the meeting, they discussed it with KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani, who approved their attendance. The problems began, said Bahaaddin, when, upon arrival in Cairo, the KIU reps found that the other participants & were not in favor of the democratic process in Iraq.⁸ Certain Iraqi attendees, said Bahaaddin, particularly Ayad Allawi and Salah Al-Mutlaq, claimed the sectarian fighting in Iraq stemmed from the current composition of the government, which, they said, gives the Shia too much power over the Sunnis.

¶7. (C) Bahaaddin said that at the conference Allawi, al-Mutlaq and others advocated a &radical⁸ restructuring of the GOI and the Army. Allawi, he said, wants to stop the political process and &go back to zero,⁸ an approach that Bahaaddin believes is unworkable. He noted that the KIU wants to &reform the current system,⁸ not replace it. There were also some controversial Kurdish attendees at the conference. According to Bahaaddin, two former &Jash⁸ (Note: Jash are ethnic Kurds who supported and/or fought for Saddam Hussein against their fellow Kurds. End note.) who had come as representatives of &Union of Northern Iraqis,⁸ a group within the Iraqi List. These two individuals were members of the Harki and Zibari tribes whose enmity to the Barzani clan pre-dates the Baathist regime. (Note: it is unclear if the two ex-Jash played a significant role at the conference, although one of them, Ashod Zebari has since launched a new

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Kurdish political party, the &Party for Freedom and Justice.⁸ End note.)

KIU Surprised by Talabani's Criticism

¶8. (C) The KIU delegation returned to Iraq from Cairo on May 2. Bahaaddin said that when they returned they thought they &had done a good thing, looking for a solution to the problems in Iraq needs hundreds of meetings, not just one.⁸ A few days later, they met with KRG Vice President Kosrat Rasoul, who, Bahaaddin claimed, did not find any fault with their attendance but said he wanted to wait until President Barzani's return from an overseas trip before discussing the meeting in detail.

¶9. (C) On June 4 the contents of the &Cairo Declaration⁸ became publicly known. GOI President and PUK leader Jalal Talabani held a press conference denouncing the Cairo Conference as &dangerous⁸ because the participants had formed a &political front,⁸ according to press reports. Talabani called for Iraqi Sunni groups that had joined this front) especially the KIU) to withdraw immediately, threatening that if they did not &we will take procedures against them.⁸

¶10. (C) Bahaaddin denied that the KIU reps had joined any sort of &front⁸ at the meeting. He did say, however, that the KIU had joined in signing a statement of &principles⁸ along with the other conference participants. (Note: Bahaaddin has since told us that this document was in fact the &Cairo Declaration,⁸ but that that he and the other KIU reps did not believe the document was intended to launch a new political movement. End note.) The real reason why KRG officials were upset with the KIU's attendance, said Bahaaddin, was that the two Jash participants &had family and personal problems with the KDP, the PUK had problems with Ayad Allawi, and the KDP also had problems with the

participation of the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF).8

¶11. (C) After June 4, said Bahaaddin, there was a &propaganda campaign8 against the KIU. The KIU responded with a press conference in which it explained its position and denied involvement in a &new front.8 It sent copies of this statement to the KRG presidency and to all the political parties. According to Bahaaddin, a June 11th session of the KRG &Supreme Council8 accepted the KIU,s explanation and the issue, in theory at least, is now settled.

¶12. (C) Comment. The KIU,s relations with the PUK and KDP have been strained ever since the KIU,s independent run in the January 2005 National Assembly elections. In the case of the Cairo meeting, the KIU,s representatives may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and became an easy focal point for Talabani and other KRG officials, unhappiness over plans to inaugurate a new opposition block that would give greater prominence to Sunni parties. Still, their explanation that they signed the &Cairo Declaration8 without fully understanding its purpose seems disingenuous. Their efforts to disavow their actions) including a recent press announcement to that effect) may not sit well with their supporters. End comment.

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